

Step 1: Why Have a Worksite Wellness Program?

What is Worksite Wellness?

For the purposes of this resource kit, worksite wellness refers to the education and activities that a worksite may do to promote healthy lifestyles to employees and their families. This resource kit focuses on risk factors that affect obesity and chronic diseases and does not address safety issues and injury prevention, which have often been addressed in the worksite in the past. Examples of wellness programming include such things as health education classes, subsidized use of fitness facilities, internal policies that promote healthy behavior, and any other activities, policies or environmental changes that affect the health of employees.

Why Worksite Wellness?

It affects your company's bottom line in many ways. Here are three key factors:

- ❖ Decreased health care costs
- ❖ Increased productivity
- ❖ Better morale

If any or all three of these factors are sufficient justification and you already believe they are likely outcomes of a wellness program, skip right to Step Two. If you need more convincing or background information, read on.

Rising healthcare benefit costs are a significant concern and poor health habits and unnecessary medical care costs consume portions of our corporate resources as well as the employee paycheck. The worksite is an ideal setting for health promotion and disease prevention programs. Employees spend many of their waking hours at work, nearing 50 hours per week. That's why the workplace is an ideal setting to address health/wellness issues.

Health related concerns are not only an issue for employees, but for the nation's employers, too. Health care premiums have doubled for the employee and employer. Employer profits are being consumed by healthcare costs. In 2000, private business expense for health services as a percentage of profit was **40%** before tax and **58%** after tax (Cowen, 2002).

Why Start a Company Wellness Program?

Wellness programs help control costs

An investment in your employees' health may lower health care costs or slow the increase in providing that important benefit. In fact, employees with more risk factors, including being overweight, smoking and having diabetes, cost more to insure and paid more for health care than people with fewer risk factors.

An employee wellness program can raise awareness so employees with fewer risk factors remain in a lower-cost group. A program also can encourage employees with health risk factors to make lifestyle changes to improve their quality of life and lower costs. The payoff in dollars as well as in quality of life can have a big impact on your company's bottom line. The average Cost/Benefit ratio for wellness programs based on a summary of 28 articles was \$3.48 saved per \$1 invested (Aldana, 2001).

Wellness programs can be simple or complex. Many programs require a minimal investment of time and money. More substantial programs often use more resources, but the many benefits to supporting and encouraging employee health and safety outweigh the costs.

Increase productivity

Healthier employees are more productive. This has been demonstrated in factory settings and in office environments in which workers with workplace wellness initiatives miss less work. Presenteeism, in which employees are physically present on the job but are not at their most productive or effective, is reduced in workplaces that have wellness programs.

Direct costs from lost time totaled nearly 15¢ on every dollar spent on payroll. (Strum, 2002)

Reduce absenteeism

Healthier employees miss less work. Companies that support wellness and healthy decisions have a greater percentage of employees at work every day. Because health frequently carries over into better family choices, your employees may miss less work caring for ill family members as well. The cost savings of providing a wellness program can be measured against reduced overtime to cover absent employees and other aspects of absenteeism.

Obese employees are almost twice as likely to be absent from work as normal weight employees because of their higher rate of weight related diseases. (Tucker, 1998)

Improve morale and enhanced image for the organization

A company that cares about its employees' health is often seen as a better place to work. Those companies save money by retaining workers who appreciate the benefit of a wellness program and they can attract new employees in a competitive market.

Still not convinced?

Here are three quick statistics and the corresponding data on the Wisconsin adult workforce.

- ❖ Illness and injury associated with an unhealthy lifestyle or modifiable risk factors is reported to account for 25% of employee health care expenditure (Anderson, 2000)
- ❖ Medical costs attributed to obesity and overweight are estimated to be annually \$395 (36%) higher than those for normal weight (Strum, 2002).
- ❖ Obese employees are nearly 75% more likely to experience high rates of absenteeism (seven or more absences during a six-month period) than normal weight employees (Tucker, 1998).

Percent of Adults with Lifestyle Health Risk Factors

Risk Factor	State of Wisconsin
Obese: Body Mass Index (BMI) ≥ 30	24%
Overweight (includes obese)(BMI ≥ 25)	62%
Diabetes	7%
Current smoker	21%
High blood pressure	25%
High cholesterol	36%
Lack of physical activity (Lack of exercise)	43%
Less than 5 servings of fruits or vegetables	78%

Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) 2005

These risk factors are both preventable and modifiable. Read on to find out what you can do.

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Why? \Rightarrow Starting Up \Rightarrow Assessing \Rightarrow Strategies \Rightarrow Making Decisions \Rightarrow Evaluation